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ABSTRACT

After briefly tracing the development of modern bibliographic instruction since the 1870s, this report concentrates on the characteristics of bibliographic instruction in the past decade. It points out that the 1980s, dubbed the "second generation" of library instruction, saw an increased emphasis on preparing students to deal critically with the information they find, rather than simply helping them to find the information. Librarians are encouraged to help students to begin thinking critically by indicating biases and limitations in the works they consult and by showing them how to find reviews of books and journals. Librarians are urged to supplement focused teaching on a single subject at the reference desk with a structured, group approach to instruction. The "one-hour stand" approach is described as an easily implemented form of library instruction. This approach typically features multi-page bibliographies that cite appropriate books and indexes and library guides that explain the card catalog, decipher periodical index entries, and suggest means of designing a research strategy. Research methods classes, which are offered through certain courses as part of the course's requirement and in conjunction with particular assignments, are also discussed, and other types of instruction are briefly outlined. It is recommended that librarians and teachers work together to determine what would best satisfy students' needs. (7 references) (SD)

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TEACHING RESEARCH STRATEGY TO UNDERGRADUATES

by

Trudie Jacobson

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Teaching Research Strategy To Undergraduates

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THE BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION program is an integral part of the services offered by most academic libraries, and is designed to introduce students in various classes to the library and to the intricacies of conducting research. While academic librarians usually refer to these classes as the well-known-in-the-field "BIs," some librarians have consciously renamed them Research Methods classes, to impart more clearly the true nature of these sessions. They encompass much more than simply a "tour" of the library. "Bibliographic instruction is intended to teach students to make intelligent, independent decisions about library use....It is through effective bibliographic instructional programs that users can be taught to make the most of the available research materials and to exploit all resources at hand."[1]

Such instruction programs in libraries are not new. In the 1870s a surge in library development accompanied a change in institutions of higher learning. Classical and religious curriculums were giving way to an elective system which allowed students more choice in selecting their areas of study. Many of the students partaking of these broader course offerings were not skilled in using the evolving research libraries. Librarians during this time period were often drawn from the teaching faculty, "possibly chosen for the job because they retained generalist interests in an era of increasing specialization. Their natural inclination in an academic setting was to teach the use of library materials for academic purposes."[2] Within a decade, however, library schools were producing graduates who had predominately studied typing, "library hand" and classification theory. These graduates, given their training, were not equal to the needs of library instruction programs.

In coming years, occasional articles attest to continuing interest in instruction programs. In 1934 an article appeared in *Library Quarterly* entitled "The Need of College and University Instruction in the Use of the Library."[3] However, such instruction programs did not really blossom until the late 1960s and early 1970s. By this time, the field of study at graduate library schools had altered considerably, and the emerging professionals were eager and able to address the growing number of students who lacked proficiency in library skills and who were confronting libraries of increasing intricacy. Conferences, seminars and workshops were organized around the theme of library instruction, and many libraries began instituting such programs. While some librarians were initially

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skeptical, instruction programs are now widely, almost universally, found in American academic libraries.[4]

Introducing students to the library can assume many forms. There is the ubiquitous "one hour stand," there are workshops, courses for credit, self-paced workbooks and computer-assisted instruction. No matter what the format, the intent is to provide students with the means to find the information they need to successfully complete assignments.

In the '80s, in what has been dubbed "the second generation" of library or bibliographic instruction, there has been increasing emphasis on preparing students to deal critically with the information they find, rather than simply on helping them find information. Mona McCormick wrote, in describing educators, "If we set goals which describe intellectual curiosity and critical thinking as values in an educated person, we have to figure out ways to move students toward these goals by giving them the *experience* of thinking while they are in an educational setting."[5]

Librarians can encourage students to begin to think critically by indicating biases and limitations in works students consult and by showing students how to find reviews of books and journals. Reference sources such as Katz's *Magazines for Libraries*[6] indicate the slant of various journals. *Book Review Index* and *Book Review Digest* lead to critical reviews. And yet who are these reviewers or critics? Have they biases of their own? Other elements to take into consideration are date and place of publication. Librarians can incorporate such probes into their presentation of materials, and can encourage students to do the same.

A typical bibliographic instruction policy might state, "While individual instruction is available through the traditional function of the reference desk, the Bibliographic Instruction Program is a formal group instructional program which is usually provided in conjunction with academic department course offerings. This instruction is provided at the request of the instructor." While a significant amount of teaching focused upon a single subject is done by librarians at the reference desk, it does not serve well as a place to teach general research strategy. A structured approach, reaching a larger number of students, is more effective.

The "one hour stand" is the form of instruction typically used. While a case might be made for the desirability of in-depth, for-credit research courses incorporating formal means of evaluation, a more limited format is more easily implemented. Depending upon the level of the students, the course, and even the number of students, various methods are used during the class hour. There is one element that all the classes generally have in common: a multi-page list of resources, specifically tailored for each class, is given to every student. These bibliographies list appropriate reference books and indexes and abstracts, and might, depending on the level of the students, include information on getting the most out of the card catalog, on deciphering periodical index entries, and on designing a search strategy. These handouts enable the students to more quickly find appropriate materials when they return to the library to do their research.

For freshmen and transfer students new to a library, the bibliographies (and perhaps accompanying copies of a library's guide) also reduce the frustration that some students feel upon entering a library. Librarians and professors tend to forget that for many, if not most, students using a library can be an intimidating experience.[7] Many do not know the layout of the library, do not understand the terminology used for materials found in libraries (so even if they know where the Index/Abstract section is, they might not know what an index or abstract is), and are afraid to ask for fear of appearing stupid. They are uncertain about formulating a topic or devising a research strategy. Unfortunately, this apprehensiveness of libraries and of independent research, which is too often based on ignorance, does not automatically disappear once a student becomes a sophomore. Many students are not formally introduced to library research until later in their academic careers. Some never are. More students are coming to college without adequate writing skills, and this lack affects their ability to investigate and fashion a well organized paper. It is often exceedingly useful for those who have attended a research methods class in one field, especially if it is in conjunction with an introductory level course, to return for a session in another discipline.

For many college students, their first formal encounter with the library occurs in a survey course, such as a literature survey course. The professors of many, if not all, sections of this course would schedule research methods classes. Classes would, and should, be scheduled in conjunction with an upcoming assignment. Students are much more receptive to the material presented when it fills an immediate and well-perceived need. A library guide, containing a layout of the library, as well as lists of the library's services, collections and access tools, would be distributed along with the bibliography. Questionnaires might be distributed in some classes, to ascertain gaps in the students' knowledge of library policies, holdings and access tools. Immediate feedback and reinforcement can be made when going over these questionnaires with the class. The complexities of the card catalog are introduced, types and uses of various reference materials are pointed out, and students are acquainted with a variety of indexes and abstracts. Lower level classes, like more advanced ones, can be customized to the particular need of the course. Individual authors and specific search strategies can be emphasized. The class might finish with an exercise requiring the student to actually find material as cited in an index or bibliography, providing hands-on experience. In the amount of time available, students are introduced to the rudiments of library research.

This knowledge can be built upon in instruction for more advanced courses. Bibliographies which are highly specific in nature are produced for use in courses such as Chaucer, Psychology of Women, Comparative Economics and Social Work Research. More time can be spent in the class on conventions of the discipline, less upon the basics of finding material in the library. In small groups, one very useful way of introducing students to important sources is to break them

into groups of two or three and have each group examine one or two sources. The groups then report to their classmates and indicate whether or not these sources would be useful for the particular paper or project assigned. The participants become very enthusiastic when they identify works that will later be helpful. Sometimes they are also surprised at the types and amount of material available.

Another type of instruction, usually used for lower level courses, includes a brief introduction to the library and to topic selection, and then consists of a detailed exercise which requires small groups of students working together to master the card catalog and periodical indexes. As proof of this mastery, students find one book and one article on a subject of their choice. Many learn the hard way when attempting to select a topic of the correct dimensions.

Other classes focus upon narrower concerns. Students are introduced to the usefulness and applicability of computer searching. The speed and specificity of an online search can be amazing. Or a class can focus on the use of a single, complex tool such as *Chemical Abstracts*, in this case using a film prepared by the producers of *Chemical Abstracts* followed by an in-depth examination of the service.

The possibilities of the research methods classes are virtually limitless, dependent upon the needs of the class. The ideal is for librarians and professors to work together to determine what would best satisfy these needs. Team teaching a segment on research in a particular field is one model that might be explored. An assignment that evaluates the students' understanding of the materials and concepts presented in the research methods class might be devised jointly by the librarian and professor and counted towards the course grade.

The more students that can be reached through research methods classes, the more students there will be who are capable of exploiting the library's resources to the utmost, and who are able to produce papers and projects based upon a judicious selection and interpretation of sources.

Notes

[1]"Think Tank Recommendations for Bibliographic Instruction," *College and Research Libraries* 42 (December 1981) : 394.

[2]Frances L. Hopkins, "A Century of Bibliographic Instruction: The Historical Claim to Professional and Academic Legitimacy," *College and Research Libraries* 43 (May 1982) : 193. I am indebted to this article for much of the historical sketch presented here.

[3]Peyton Hurt, "The Need of College and University Instruction in the Use of the Library," *Library Quarterly* 4 (1934) : 436-448.

[4]There is a debate among reference librarians that pits proponents of instruction against those that contend that actual information be delivered to the patron. Further information

on the former position will be found in this paper. For a view of the opposing side, see William A. Katz, *Introduction to Reference Work, Volume II: Reference Services and Reference Processes*, 2d ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).

[5]Mona McCormick, "Critical Thinking and Library Instruction," *RQ* 22 (Summer 1983) : 339-41.

[6]Bill Katz and Linda Sternberg Katz, *Magazines for Libraries*, 5th ed., (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1986).

[7]Telling examples of this problem will be found in Bobbie L. Collins, Constance A. Mellon and Sally B. Young's article, "The Needs and Feelings of Beginning Researchers," in *Bibliographic Instruction: The Second Generation*, ed. Constance A. Mellon (Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1987).